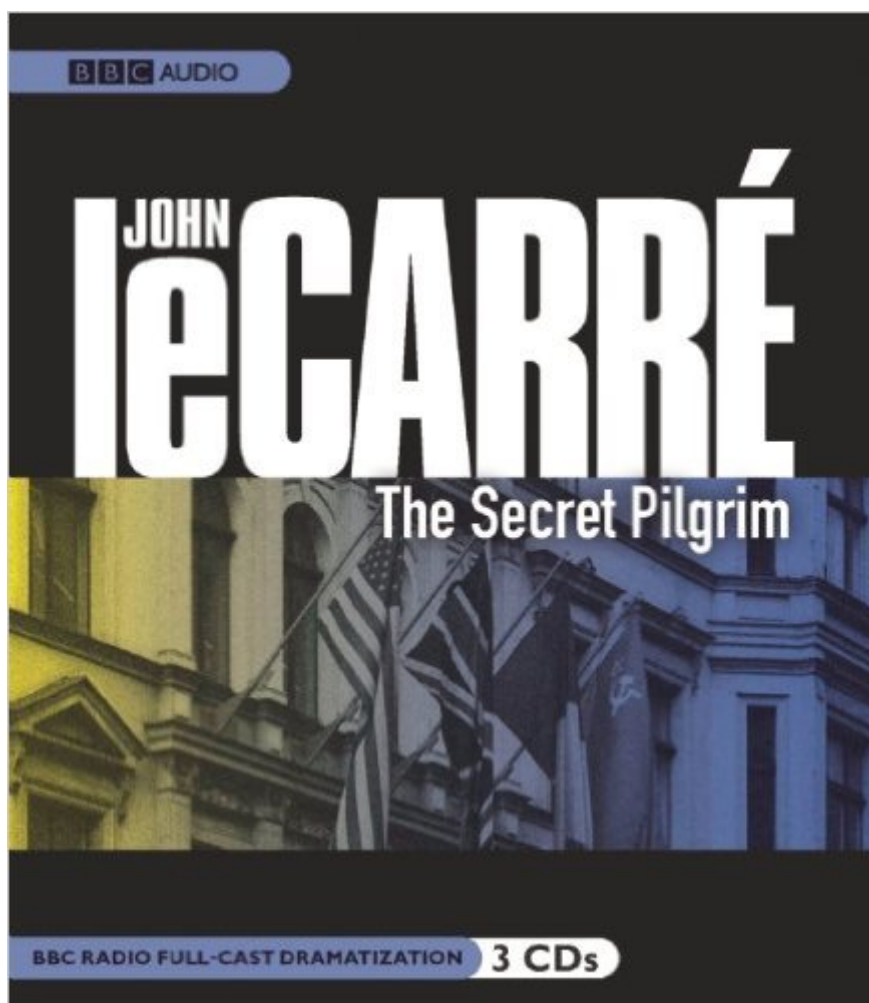


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The Secret Pilgrim (BBC Full Cast Radio Drama)(George Smiley Series) (BBC Radio Series)



Synopsis

The Berlin Wall is toppled and the Iron Curtain has swept aside. The Secret Pilgrim is Ned, a decent, loyal soldier of the Cold War, who has been in British Intelligence all his adult life. Now, approaching the end of his career, he is forced to revisit his secret years. He illuminates the brave past of George Smiley, his hero and mentor, who gives back to him the dangerous edge of memory that empowers him finally to frame the questions that have haunted him for thirty years

Book Information

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Best Sellers Rank: #2,124,925 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in [Books > Books on CD >](#)

[Authors, A-Z > \(L \) > Le Carre, John](#) #3920 in [Books > Books on CD > Mystery & Thrillers](#)

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Customer Reviews

And probably still be enthralled. The man has one of the most engaging, fluid, and delightful prose styles of anyone I've ever read. When it's connected with a powerful story (such as the books of the Karla Trilogy) the result is overpowering. When combined with leftovers from that era the result is...still a damn good read. What stops it short of a great read (4 stars) or a masterwork (5 stars) is one simple problem: Ned's stories (in fact the character himself) isn't anywhere near as interesting as George Smiley. Smiley's presence in this book actually detracts from the stories. It's like dropping Luciano Pavarotti into a men's choir. You're so busy trying to hear *him* that you can't enjoy the rest of the music. Anyway, this is not a novel, it's a collection of short stories. Very good short stories. Brilliant not only for their intrigue, but simply for their literary quality. You do have to get past a few Le Carre trademarks (a tendency towards glibness, and a seeming inability to create female characters who are more than just surface), but these are less flaws than simply elements of the Le Carre style. You won't notice them as you're reading the stories. You won't notice much of

anything else, either; these stories are completely engrossing, the kind that have you up until the wee hours telling yourself "just one more...ok, two more." The Secret Pilgrim, however, does suffer from focusing on the wrong character, "Ned" instead of George Smiley. It's not a big problem, but at some points during my reading I found myself saying "hold on, let Smiley tell a story!" Who among us wouldn't have preferred a collection of short stories about the Master instead of his Acolyte?

Ned, the narrator, is nearing retirement from the British Intelligence, or "The Circus" as it is known. The book opens on the occasion of the traditional informal dinner that celebrates the end of the training of a new class of spies-to-be who will be among the first to operate in the post Cold War environment. Ned, who has been in charge of their training, has invited his already retired mentor, George Smiley, to speak at the get-together. To Ned's surprise, Smiley has accepted. All this is in the way of setting the scene for the series of reminiscences that make up the meat of THE SECRET PILGRIM. Smiley, who has attained the status of a legend in the service, keeps the students entranced for hours and his comments trigger a life time of memories in Ned, who has been one of the Circus' key players in a forty year career that covered most of the Cold War years. One of Ned's earliest experiences, in the final phase of his training, was when an older hand kept him from making a career ending faux pas. He misread a situation and believed that a member of a visiting Royal's retinue was an intended assassin. Ned, who was anxious to show off his new found skills was about to jump the "assassin" but was prevented from doing so by the more experienced agent. This was a learning experience that he never forgot. As the evening progresses we share more of Ned's memories with him. One is when a murder is made to look like a suicide, and false evidence is left that was meant to discredit Ned. At another time, almost every group of spies that he is "running" are betrayed, and a number of innocent people are thought to be the betrayers.

In my teaching past, I came to love some of the great writers -- Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, Faulkner. I can now add John Le Carre to that list. Over the years, I have kept coming back to him, especially the cold war epics involving George Smiley. These books have come to be known as the "Karla" novels, named after Smiley's Soviet nemesis and master-mind of betrayal. Having passed, however, through a "spiritual search" and having been subsequently dulled and fatigued by the numbing routines of work, I have, nevertheless, in order to occupy my mind with something other than the details of the job, returned to the soul searching of this novelist, who now appeals to me even more than when I was young and obsessed with meaningful pilgrimages. And now here is The Secret Pilgrim. As the title suggests, its theme is the hidden journeys that cannot be explained by a

routine narrative but must be felt, or more accurately, lived. Written in 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet empire, *The Secret Pilgrim* spans the thirty years of cold war spy life from the point of view of a single agent recollecting his own observation of the moral ambiguities and soul-destroying ambitions that have become the hallmark of Le Carre's writings. In the background, George Smiley, the main character in his previous cold war novels, represents a man who survived the wasteland of underground service to his country (England) by accepting his inner ruin as a natural byproduct of spying. He became a model of how deception can be accepted as the essence of spy life by hiding the betrayals that have scarred him behind a wisdom and competency that allowed him to survive the cultural insanities of his time.

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